

Endless 131

Chapter 131: The Ember Howl Sovereign [Part 2]

Alex saw a big red wolf break past the trees, heading straight for them.

At a glance, he could tell this was the Boss Monster he had been monitoring on his map. Right now, its merciless gaze was fixed on Bob, Grint, and Jorven.

Alex knew that the three teenagers couldn't survive the wolf, one of the four monsters assigned to thin down the number of candidates by eliminating anyone unlucky enough to cross their paths. He quickly devised a plan to save them from a grim fate.

"Enchant Holy!" Alex said as he summoned a wooden sandal.

What appeared in his hand was none other than his legendary weapon, Grandma Agnes' Sandal!

Without even a second thought, the young man launched the sandal like a railgun, sending it flying at the speed of sound.

For a brief moment, Bob and his companions thought Alex was attacking them. However, when they heard a pained roar behind them, they understood the situation was way worse. Their most dreaded fear had come to life.

"Don't look back and just run!" Alex shouted as the wooden sandal reappeared in his hand.

He once again threw it at the approaching Boss Monster.

His plan wasn't to kill it, but to hopefully inflict enough pain that it would stop its pursuit.

The Legendary Weapon could be thrown six times a day, and it would never miss its target.

It also dealt true damage, which would make the Boss Monster feel pain every time the sandal smacked its face to oblivion.

Alex threw the sandal a third and a fourth time.

The Wolf Monster staggered a bit every time a hit landed. The impact of Alex's long-range attack was nothing to scoff at.

The Rank 4 Boss Monster was now very angry, but it had also become wary of the wooden sandal that had repeatedly targeted its nose, one of its very sensitive body parts.

When it saw Alex about to throw the sandal for the fourth time, the wolf decided that enough was enough and opened its mouth to unleash a Fireball in his direction.

"Svalinn!" Alex shouted, momentarily stuffing his wooden sandal back to his storage ring to equip the round black shield.

< The passive skill, Improved Fire Resistance, is now active! >

Alex planted his feet firmly on the ground and tanked the Fireball that slammed into him with fury.

A grunt escaped his lips as he skidded two meters away from where he had stood. However, he managed to tank the attack. This distracted the Boss Monster, which gave time for Bob and the others to reach him safely.

"Run to the meeting area!" Alex said. "I'll follow you shortly."

Alex didn't even wait for the three teenagers to reply as he once again summoned his wooden sandal.

"Enchant Holy!"

He only had two enchant skills—Enchant Fire and Enchant Holy.

Since Enchant Fire was useless against the Two-Horned Blaze Wolf, he simply added Holy Element to his sandal, giving it a small damage boost, effective in smiting demons!

'Too bad, it's not an insect,' Alex thought as he threw his sandal for the fifth time.

As soon as the sandal left his hand, he ran after Bob and the others.

Simultaneously, he heard a notification sound and an angry roar behind him.

< Critical Hit! >

— — —

< Vulkarath, the Ember Howl Sovereign>

“Vulkarath plays with fire not like a beast, but like a butcher sharpening his blade.”

Monster Rank: Rank 4

Monster Grade: Rare

Attribute: Fire / Demonic

Species: Two-Horned Blaze Wolf

Type: Wandering Boss Monster

Health: 8,887 / 9,500

Attack: 850 – 1,150

Active Skills: Fireball, Blazing Pounce, Howl of the Ember Sovereign

Passive Skills: Scorch Fang Frenzy

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Alex briefly glanced at the information of the Boss Monster and couldn't help but grin after seeing that his attack had shaved off around six hundred points from the latter's health bar.

However, he believed that the critical hit from Grandma Agnes' Sandal was the true MVP.

But his grin didn't last for long. When he looked behind, he saw Vulkarath charging in his direction with bloodshot eyes.

Knowing he couldn't outrun the wolf, Alex glanced at his map before making a decision.

"Bob, we can't outrun it!" Alex shouted. "Dim Dim and the others are on their way to us, so let's just hold it off until then!"

"Are you crazy?!" Bob asked. "We've just become Rankers. We can't defeat that thing!"

"I know!" Alex replied. "But what else can we do but fight?! I'll tank everything, so you guys just do what you can to the best of your abilities!"

Alex stopped running and raised the sandal to throw it one last time.

When Vulkarath saw the wooden sandal, it hesitated. Its movement slowed a little.

Since the legendary weapon dealt true damage, it really hurt the Boss Monster whenever it hit, even though the damage to its health wasn't that great.

That brief moment when Vulkarath slowed down was enough for Alex to launch his throwing weapon for the last time.

A sonic boom erupted as soon as the wooden sandal took flight, heading once more toward Vulkarath's nose, which was already bleeding due to Alex's consecutive strikes.

The Boss Monster grunted in pain as it staggered after getting smacked by the wooden sandal.

When it had encountered other trial takers, they had only been able to scream. None of them had been able to put up a resistance, and the Boss Monster had eliminated every single one of them without too much effort.

However, no matter how much it tried to dodge the wooden sandal, it always collided with its nose, bringing it grief beyond the pain it felt.

Its speed was useless against it because it was faster and moved at the speed of sound!

But just as the Ember Howl Sovereign was recovering from its latest injury, it saw a spinning golden shield flying towards it.

Due to the injury it had received just a while ago, its movements were a bit sluggish, so it wasn't able to dodge right away.

The golden spinning shield imbued with the Holy Element hit its nose once more, making it curse the young man and his nine generations for playing dirty!

Unfortunately, Alex's three-hit combo wasn't over yet.

He first threw the wooden sandal to make the Boss Monster stagger.

He then threw Svalinn using his skill, Shield Boomerang, for a follow-up attack.

And as soon as the shield left his hand, he summoned Everguard and unleashed a Shield Charge.

These three attacks were done in rapid succession. Alex was betting everything he had to deal as much damage as possible to the Boss Monster while he still could.

When he was only a few meters away from the giant Two-Horned Blaze Wolf, he summoned three magical shields in front of him, forming a staircase, which he climbed before jumping toward the monster's head.

"Shield Charge!" Alex roared as he slammed his shield imbued with the Holy Element on Vulakarath's nose, dealing another critical damage and breaking the monster's nose completely.

Bob, Grint, and Jorven looked at the crazy young man. His antics made them feel as if they were dreaming.

Someone who was the same age as them was actually trying to fight a Rank 4 Boss Monster. Even more shockingly, he actually managed to make it cry out in pain.

The Headmaster of the Academy, as well as the other Professors, looked at the projection and gazed at the brave Oathkeeper, and sighed in admiration.

What they didn't know was that the "brave" Oathkeeper was actually screaming and crying for help internally.

Alex's only wish was for his friends to come sooner to save his sorry bum from the Boss Monster, who now hated him down to its very core.

Chapter 132: The Ember Howl Sovereign [Part 3]

“Good going, Alex!” Bob shouted. “Good job!”

Truth be told, Bob was very impressed with how the young man didn’t seem to hesitate to stay behind and stand against a Rank 4 Boss Monster to save them.

Though as Bob and his two comrades looked at the Two-Horned Blaze Wolf, whose nose was bloody, they had a misconception that the boss wasn’t a big deal.

Clearly, they had not faced such a powerful monster in the past and were underestimating its abilities.

Even so, Bob had a good head over his shoulders, and paid close attention to the Monster, who was eyeing the silver-haired boy with blood-shot eyes.

“Bob, there’s no time to explain,” Alex said urgently as he looked at the monster, who was still reeling from his three-combo attack. “I want you, Grint, and Jorven to target one of the wolf’s legs and keep hitting on that same spot.

“However, only attack it after I use my taunt skill, so it won’t attack any of you. Do I make myself clear?”

“Okay!” Bob replied. “You hear that, boys? Alex will tank it, we go for the kill!”

“”Okay!””

Grint and Jorven took out their weapons and braced themselves for a confrontation.

Seeing their determined expressions, Alex also steeled himself to take a beating.

But for some reason, he didn’t feel too afraid of the Rank 4 Boss Monster.

Perhaps the danger he had faced during the Monster Outbreak overshadowed the danger he was currently facing.

Back then, they had been surrounded by countless monsters and had to first break through their encirclement.

They had been on guard every moment, for one mistake would have been all it took for them to be overwhelmed from all sides.

Now that he was only fighting one opponent, he could focus all of his attention on it.

Vulkarath was strong. But it relied more on speed and its flames to defeat its opponent.

Since Alex smartly switched between his two shields, Svalinn and Everguard, depending on the situation, he was able to minimize the effect of the Boss Monster's flame attacks to a certain extent.

Also, the Two-Horned Blaze Wolf's blows earlier made Alex realize that the Twilight Stag, Aurhorn, had hit just as hard as the Rank 4 Boss Monster before him.

He had taken the full force of the Twilight Stag's charge dozens of times while they were escaping the Dungeon of Beginnings.

So, unless Vulkarath's physical power surpassed Aurhorn's, Alex was confident he could hold out until reinforcements arrived.

"Just remember, after you attack its legs once, immediately distance yourself!" Alex instructed. "Only attack when you see an opportunity!"

It was quite unfortunate that Alex's left arm was still injured, so he could only hold a shield for the time being.

if he could use both hands, he would have more options in this battle.

Judging by the distance between the blinking dots on the map, it would still take Dim Dim and the others a few more minutes to reach them.

'I need to hold on no matter what.' Alex focused his concentration on the Boss Monster, whose gaze was firmly fixed on him.

The Boss Monster still looked as intimidating as ever, but the sight of its bloodied nose gave Alex a pang of regret. He could only throw Grandma Agnes' Sandals six times a day.

'If only there were no limit!' Alex thought. With its mile-long range and supersonic speed, the sandal was less of a joke and more of a tactical nuke in disguise. If he could throw it endlessly, wouldn't that make him practically invincible?

Unfortunately, reality wasn't that kind. He had already burned through the day's quota, leaving him with no choice but to fall back on his old roots, the shield.

"Unyielding Pact!" Alex shouted as he activated his skill that boosted the resolve and morale of his party members.

It also increased their resistance against fear, charm, or mind-affecting charms.

Bob and the others had originally been intimidated by the Boss Monster, but after getting the buff, their minds cleared, and they became more determined to fight alongside Alex.

Everguard faintly bathed in a golden light, enchanted by the Holy Element.

"What's wrong?" Alex asked the Boss Monster. "Does your nose hurt?"

Alex wasn't using a taunting skill on purpose, but his ridicule was enough to make the Boss Monster charge at him with fury.

Unbeknownst to him, a few groups of trial takers were observing the battle from afar because the wolf's howl had caught their attention.

They wanted to see who was brave enough to face a Boss Monster.

But there were ambitious people within these groups as well. If they saw an opportunity to strike, they would also attack the Boss Monster to get the sigil. With the sigil in hand, they would automatically pass the second trial and become scholarship students.

Alex had no plans on simply taking hits.

The moment the wolf's claw descended to swat him, he positioned his shield to counterattack as well.

"Shield Bash!"

The young man groaned in pain as he was pushed back a few meters.

He had timed his attack perfectly to mitigate some of the force behind the Monster's blow, reducing its impact.

"Now!" Bob shouted as he, Grint, and Jorven all ran and attacked the hind leg of the Two-Horned Blaze Wolf.

"Slash!" Grint roared as he swung his sword.

"Heavy Slash!" Bob attacked the same spot that Grint had hit before running away.

"Sonic Pierce!" Jorven, who specialized in using the spear, unleashed his strongest attack with pinpoint accuracy.

The consecutive attacks managed to inflict some damage to the Boss Monster. Unfortunately, the trio's best efforts were not enough to injure the Blaze Wolf seriously.

Angered by the annoying insects, Vulkarath shifted its attention to Jorven, who was just about to run away after unleashing his skill.

"Where are you looking at, you stupid dog?!" Alex shouted.

< Taunt [EX] activated! >

Jorven, who was about to be bitten by the wolf, felt relief when the Boss Monster stopped its attack and shifted its attention back to Alex.

"Jorven, counterattack!" Bob, who understood that Alex was about to take another blow from the wolf, charged with his sword raised high.

Grint followed behind him and ran after the wolf, who then lunged at Alex with its jaws wide open.

Alex's concentration was at his peak, and he waited until the jaws of the wolf were only a few meters away from him before activating another one of his skills.

"Shield Charge!"

The sudden burst in speed allowed Alex to evade the wolf's jaws as he slammed his shield on the wolf's front leg.

< Stun activated! >

Shield Charge and Shield Bash both had a chance of stunning their target. It didn't always work, but when it did, it gave a window of opportunity for the young man's allies to attack.

“Slash!”

“Heavy Slash!”

“Sonic Pierce!”

The three targeted the same spot that they had hit earlier. This time, a visible wound appeared on the Boss Monster’s leg.

Alex was about to distance himself from the Boss Monster when it made a move to swipe at him.

Due to its superior speed, Alex was barely able to block the attack, so he was still sent flying.

Bob and the others wanted to help him, but they also understood that without Alex tanking the blows, they were just easy prey for the Boss Monster.

As such, instead of running toward him, they ran away from him.

Alex groaned as he propped himself up from the ground.

If not for the fact that he subconsciously raised his shield to block, he might have received a serious injury from that blow alone.

The Wolf roared as it lunged at the young man, who had still not fully recovered from its counterattack.

But at that moment, it saw something fast, white, and small out the corner of its eye.

“Dim!”

Dim Dim, who had now arrived at the scene, threw its brittle vial at the wolf's head, targeting one of its eyes.

The sound of something cracking, followed by a pained cry, reverberated through the forest. Alex heaved a sigh of relief.

Although it would take the others a minute or two to arrive at his location, the Dim Sum God had gone ahead in order to help its partner in fending off the Two-Horned Blaze Wolf, whose furious roar was like music in Alex's ears.

Chapter 133: The Strongest Team [Part 1]

"Interesting," Rowan said with a smile. "I didn't think someone among the candidates would be able to last a minute against Vulkarath. He even managed to break its nose."

"Don't underestimate our Oathkeeper," Ramza replied proudly. "Although that Two-Horned Blaze Wolf is strong, it will not defeat him so easily."

"Indeed." Rowan nodded. "Vulkarath underestimated the trial takers, which allowed Alex to break its momentum. But the fight is far from over. It's still a Rank 4 Boss Monster after all. No matter how strong his talent, he's bound to lose this fight."

"If he were alone, you'd be right," commented Cairo, who had been listening to the conversation. "But he has a team. Once they arrive, there's a chance they will win against that thing."

"We'll see if they have what it takes to defeat that Boss Monster." Rowan smirked. "You haven't seen anything yet."

"Then, how about we make a bet?" Ramza proposed. "If they beat that monster, how about you allow one of them to become a scholarship student even if they get eliminated from this trial?"

"And, what will you bet in return?" Rowan stroked his beard.

"How about a favor from the Clawford Tribe?" Ramza suggested, knowing his old friend couldn't hardly refuse that.

Rowan chuckled. "You have a deal."

"Good." Ramza nodded.

He and Rowan had been friends for a long time, so striking a deal with the old Headmaster was not a problem.

Besides, the Clawford Tribe regularly assisted Frieden Academy whenever there were missions requiring the services of Demon Slayers.

As the two old men shifted their attention back to the battle, Lavinia, Charles, Renard, and Nessia had finally arrived at the scene.

"Dim Dim, give Nessia all the cores we got during our hunt," Alex said. "Ask her to make an offensive magic formation that can deal serious injury to this monster."

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim agreed and jumped off Alex's head.

In order to prevent the monster from targeting the Dim Sum God, the young man ran in the opposite direction and used himself as bait.

With one of its eyes temporarily blinded by Dim Dim's attack, the wolf charged at Alex with the intent to kill.

But it had only taken a few steps when it stopped and shifted its attention to Charles, who had sneaked behind it.

Challenger's Mark.

That was Charles' eternally active passive skill.

Although its effects weren't as exaggerated as when he was inside a dungeon, it was still very effective in drawing the aggro of the monsters towards him.

While the skill's effect was only within a ten-meter range when Charles was outside of a dungeon, it still acted like an unspoken challenge.

A challenge that monsters couldn't ignore.

Although it was confused, the Boss Monster only hesitated for a brief moment before it bared its fangs at Charles, whose right arm was now covered in a black, metallic armor.

"Ant Queen, come!" Charles shouted.

A second later, a Rank 1 Ant Queen rose up from his shadow and stood between him and Vulkarath.

The Ant Queen pushed Charles away before unleashing an acid spray at the wolf monster at point-blank range, not even caring if it was about to be bitten to death.

< Queen Black Ant >

Monster Rank: Rank 1 Boss Monster

Monster Grade: Uncommon

Type: Dungeon Boss Monster

Health: 600 / 600

Attack: 20 – 50

Note: Not all queens are regal. Some are monstrous, their love a curse that spawns legions of gnashing maws.

Alex recognized the Boss Monster, which they had seen in the Hidden Dungeon at the Briar Mountain.

The sudden appearance of the Ant Queen took everyone by surprise.

But Vulkarath's attack was already underway.

The acid struck the wolf's face, sizzling loudly on contact. But Vulkarath endured the pain and lunged. It clamped down on the Ant Queen's head, tearing it off from her body.

Like all dungeon monsters, she faded into particles of light as her lifeless body hit the ground.

"Come, Ant Soldiers!" Charles slammed his palms on the ground, creating a magic circle that summoned four Rank 1 Ant Soldiers to fight for him.

< Soldier Black Ant >

Monster Rank: Rank 1

Monster Grade: Uncommon

Type: Ant Type Monster

Health: 100 / 100

Attack: 10 – 40

The four Black Ants didn't charge at the Boss Monster. Instead, they created a defensive formation with Charles at the rear.

They knew they couldn't defeat the enemy. But, they could still buy time by serving as meat shields to protect their master from the wolf's deadly strikes.

White mist rose from the wound on Vulkarath's face, a lingering effect of the Ant Queen's Acid Spray.

Perhaps pushed to the limits of its patience and humiliated from being toyed with by weaklings, the Two-Horned Blazed Wolf let out a furious growl. That was all the warning it was willing to give. It then unleashed a fireball at Charles and the insects shielding him.

At that moment, a shout filled with determination reached everyone's ears.

"Eat this!" Alex shouted as he stepped on his magical shield that he had summoned mid-air and lunged behind the wolf monster.

"Rear-End Thrust!"

The young man had very limited options, so he used his "strongest attack," which dealt true damage, bypassed all defenses, and always landed as a critical hit!

While this attack might sound funny, it was actually one of Alex's strongest skills.

The damage of this skill scaled from the combined stats of Alex's Agility, Dexterity, and Strength.

In short, it was just like Grandma Agnes' Sandals, an attack guaranteed to bring a world of pain to anyone unlucky enough to be on the receiving end.

"Awoooooooo!"

The fireball that Vulkarath was about to unleash dispersed from its mouth as it howled in pain from the unexpected attack on its backside.

But it was not over yet.

Lavinia, who had jumped high in the air, unleashed the ultimate combo of her Job Class, Horizon Striker, dealing dozens of attacks at the Boss Monster's left eye that was still temporarily blinded by Dim Dim's brittle vial.

"Skyhook Spiral!"

This skill allowed Lavinia's sword whip to stick to a target like a grappling hook. This meant that Lavinia could pull herself to the target location with ease.

The moment she was only a few meters away from the Boss Monster's face, she unleashed her opener combo, dealing consecutive sword strikes at the monster's left eye, intending to blind it.

"Snake Scourge!"

A rapid succession of 8 furious sword strikes descended on the monster's eye, dealing critical damage.

This combo attack only lasted for a few seconds before the Catkin pulled back her arm to unleash her finisher attack at point-blank range.

“Razor Requiem!”

Lavinia split the sword whip into three segments mid-swing, hitting the monster with its serrated edges, causing bleed and critical damage.

She then jumped off the Boss Monster’s head in order to avoid its counterattack.

Horizon Strikers specialized in quick and rapid attacks that dealt critical and bleed damage.

It was a Job Class that specialized in speed and mobility, suiting her perfectly.

“Slash!”

“Heavy Slash!”

“Sonic Pierce!”

Bob, Grint, and Jorven had run away earlier, but they now returned after seeing that their reinforcements had arrived.

Taking advantage of the monster’s confusion, they once again targeted the monster’s hind leg. This time, they managed to deal a serious injury to the one spot they had consistently targeted earlier.

Vulkarath was confused, in pain, and still reeling from the consecutive attacks that he had suffered in less than a minute.

Due to its current condition, it didn’t manage to sense that another person had arrived in front of it.

There was a reason why Alex was hell-bent on forcing Renard to join their team.

As one of the main Heroes of ELO, the teenage boy had some cheat-like abilities that were exclusive only to Protagonists.

He drew his fist back, ready to punch the Wolf Monster's front leg with the skill that made him one of the strongest characters in the game.

And the name of that skill was...

"Titan Breaker!" Renard roared as he unleashed the killer move he had wanted to use against Alex earlier.

The force behind this attack was truly devastating because its damage was equivalent to Renard's Strength Stat multiplied ten times.

This skill always dealt critical damage and staggered its target without fail!

It was a blow so heavy that even titans would kneel after they were hit by it.

The sound of bones cracking spread through the surroundings as the Boss Monster's front right leg snapped in half after taking that devastating blow.

Everyone watched as the powerful Boss Monster collapsed to the ground with a loud thud. The spectators who were watching the battle from afar gasped in shock at the unexpected outcome that no one had seen coming.

Chapter 134: The Strongest Team [Part 2]

Everyone looked at the Rank 4 Boss Monster in shock after Renard had just effectively crippled it with a single punch.

Of course, Alex was the only one who remained unfazed. He had long known what Renard was capable of.

'I was the one who raised this kid,' Alex thought while smirking.

Kidding aside, only the young man knew that Renard could use this blow once a day. Not to mention, while the skill was powerful, its recoil was also nothing to scoff at.

The result of using this skill repeatedly was the crippling of his hand, an outcome Renard naturally wanted to avoid as much as possible.

Suddenly, the teenage boy felt something ominous, so he hastily distanced himself from the Boss Monster, despite the latter looking incapable of further battle.

Surprised by his actions, many trial takers watching the battle thought that he had made a mistake. In their eyes, it was the perfect opportunity to deal the killing blow to the Boss Monster and end its reign of terror.

However, as if to prove them wrong, Vulkarath's entire body suddenly burst into flames as it transformed into some kind of spiritual wolf covered in flames.

This was Vulkarath's last resort, activated as soon as its health bar dropped below 30%

Like most Boss Monsters, Vulkarath possessed a berserk ability that made it significantly more dangerous when pushed to the brink of death.

The Ember Howl Sovereign was a bit special. Instead of gaining incredible strength, its entire body would transform into elemental flame, raising its magical abilities to the limits.

With a roar filled with vengeance, it lunged at Renard, treating him as the greatest threat in the field.

But how could Alex let the Boss Monster get its way so easily?

"Over here, you piece of sh*t!" Alex yelled.

< Taunt [EX] activated! >

Vulkarath, whose jaws were about to bite off half of Renard's body, paused mid-strike before turning around to face the young man, who had swapped his shield to Svalinn.

Fueled with madness and hate, the Ember Howl Sovereign transformed into a fiery comet, putting everything on the line to kill the annoying human who had driven it crazy.

Alex stomped his right foot forward and used Enchant Holy on Svalinn.

A moment later, he activated his skill, Shield Charge, intending to clash with the Boss Monster instead of passively blocking its attack.

A blazing red comet and a golden comet clashed against each other, creating a powerful shock wave that pushed everything back within a hundred-meter radius.

Charles, Lavinia, Renard, Bob, Grint, and Jorven tried to hold their ground, but they were still blown away by the impact of the collision of the two attacks.

An explosion followed suit. The aftermath of Vulkarath's and the Oathkeeper's collision was that the surroundings were blanketed with thick white smoke.

Lavinia, who was the first to recover, didn't hesitate to run toward the center of the explosion to see what happened to Alex and help him in any way possible.

"Alex!" Lavinia waved her sword, creating a gust of wind that blew away the smoke blocking her view.

There, she saw a young man kneeling on the ground, using his shield to support his body.

Ramza and the Professors of the Academy couldn't help but look on in shock, unable to fathom that someone could actually survive Vulkarath's ultimate skill, Scorch Fang Frenzy.

The Two-Horned Blaze Wolf lay a few meters away from him, struggling to stand, but eventually collapsing.

It had once again reverted to its beast form. It was equally surprised to realize that Alex had been able to survive its strongest attack.

Of course, the only reason Alex survived was because the Boss Monster had turned into pure flame during its final attack.

Also, Svalinn's passive skill, Improved Fire Resistance, was the sole reason he could tank the lethal blow.

But Alex still suffered from the Boss Monster's trump card. After all, Svalinn's passive ability still had a limit.

His clothes were burned and charred in some places, and he looked a little pale.

However, Lavinia was still relieved to see that he wasn't as hurt as she had thought he would be.

"Are you alright?" Lavinia asked, about to crouch down to support Alex's body, but the young man raised his hand to stop her.

"Finish it, Lavinia!" Alex said in an exhausted voice. "Hurry, before anything else happens."

Lavinia nodded in understanding and extended her sword whip, making it spin like a drill,

"Horizon Piercer!" Lavinia lashed at the dying Boss Monster. Her weapon pierced its right eye, passing through to the other side of its head.

Vulkarath uttered an unwilling groan before its body transformed into particles of light, disappearing completely.

A second later, the young man heard several notification sounds inside his head, followed by a blue window screen that showed the rewards he gained after his party defeated one of the Boss Monsters of the island.

< Level Up! >

< Level Up! >

< Level Up! >

— — —

< You have completed a Hidden Quest! >

< Quest Name: Vulkarath's Defeat >

< Rewards >

— 2,000 Arcana Points, Vulkarath's Fur, Vulkarath's Horns, Vulkarath's Core

— — —

Alex was only happy that the battle was finally over and that no one from his team had been eliminated.

But just as he thought that he could finally rest, he heard dozens of footsteps heading in the direction where Vulkarath's body had been located earlier.

"That sigil is mine!" a trial taker who had been watching the battle since the beginning lunged at the glowing sigil and the monster core lying on the ground.

The moment someone touched the sigil, they would automatically pass the second trial and become a scholarship student. It was a temptation that was simply too hard to ignore.

Alex and Lavinia, who had completely forgotten about the dropped items due to the tension of the battle earlier, were unable to react in time.

However, just as the teenage boy was about to get his hands on the Sigil and the Boss Monster's Core, something small, white, and fast snatched the items away before putting them inside its mouth.

Dim Dim wouldn't allow anyone to take the rewards his team had worked so hard for!

So, after snatching the sigil and the monster core, it ran toward Renard, who had taken a fighting pose, ready to smack anyone who was going to take their rewards away from them.

Seeing the person who had snapped the Boss Monster's leg in half with a single punch, the opportunistic trial taker finally came to his senses and stopped his pursuit of the Dim Sum God.

Dim Dim then stuck its tongue out and made faces at the teenage boy while hiding behind Renard's leg because it knew that its pursuer wouldn't dare to come near the person, who could make a boss monster kneel with a single punch.

Chapter 135: True Despair

Charles, Bob, Grint, and Jorven quickly understood the situation and rushed to Dim Dim's aid, glaring at the bastards who must've thought they could take advantage of other people's hard-earned victory.

"Scram before I punch you!" Renard roared in anger.

The trial taker who had attempted to rob their group under their noses sprinted to his party members, fearing Renard might really punch him the way he had punched that Boss Monster.

However, his unwilling eyes didn't escape the notice of Alex and his team. With that, they understood the former might cause trouble for them at a later time.

There were other teams greedily eyeing them from afar, so Renard glanced at them and raised his fist, threatening them.

“Come if you want to die!” Renard’s voice was filled with arrogance, intimidating the trial takers who also wished to get the sigil.

After a tense face-off that lasted for a few minutes, the other candidates backed away and left Alex’s team alone.

Nessia had also just finished her magic formation and was only waiting for their enemies to strike before she sent them all to hell. Honestly, she really wanted them to attack, so she was a little disappointed that they didn’t have any backbone. It would have been interesting to watch them fall to their demise.

“All of you, well done,” Alex said as he approached his team members with Lavinia supporting his right arm. “If you guys hadn’t arrived, I’d probably be dead by now.”

“... I should have waited a bit,” Renard commented regretfully. “I should have waited until that monster killed you before I broke its leg.”

The corner of Alex’s lips twitched. He knew that Renard was saying what he truly felt inside.

Clearly, the teenage boy was still holding a grudge against Alex for everything that he had experienced in the past.

“Nessia, have you used up the cores?” Alex decided to ignore Renard for the time being and turned his attention to the young lady, who was also just as powerful as Renard, though in a different way.

“Not yet,” Nessia replied with a smile. “Good job staying alive. But what do you plan to do with the sigil and the core?”

“We can use the core to strengthen our magic formation and increase our chances of surviving the trial’s final day,” Alex replied. “As for the Sigil, I will let Dim Dim hold onto it for now. We need everyone in the team to survive, so staying together is the best option for now.”

Alex then crouched down to pat Dim Dim, the true MVP of this battle.

“You did well, Dim Dim,” Alex said. “Thanks!”

“Ahem~” Dim Dim puffed up proudly, clearly happy from Alex’s praise.

Now that the adrenaline had worn off, exhaustion hit Alex like a truck. He started becoming aware of every ache and injury he had received from the battle.

Fortunately, he had brought several healing potions, which he consecutively chugged to recover.

“Let’s head back to our campsite for the rest of the trial,” Alex said in a volume that only his teammates could hear. “I’m pretty sure that they will stalk us, but there is nothing we can do right now. If they cross the line, we’ll deal with them.”

His team nodded in agreement, knowing there wasn’t much they could do about being followed.

As the teenagers headed toward the spot they had chosen as their base, Rowan and the other Professors of the Academy discussed the battle against the Boss Monster.

They were genuinely impressed by the skill Alex’s team had shown.

They unanimously agreed Alex’s team was the strongest on the island and hoped all of them would survive the last day of the trial.

However, most of the Professors were now paying close attention to Renard, especially the Martial Arts Professor, who was itching to train the boy himself.

“His name is Renard Vale, right?” The Martial Arts Professor looked at Renard’s registration document with a smile. “This boy is very promising. I like him!”

"I'm sure you do, Professor." Rowan smirked. "It has been a while since I saw you this excited."

Ramza and Cairo glanced at each other before shaking their heads helplessly.

Although Alex and Lavinia had performed very well, they were still overshadowed by Renard's display of raw strength and power.

"That kid is going places," Ramza said to Cairo. "What do you think?"

"My sister and disciple are still better," Cairo replied. "Did you see how Alex toyed with him earlier? That's how you use brains and brawn in battle."

"Cairo is right." Elaine nodded. "Alex and Lavinia did well."

"Hmph!" Efa pouted. "If only Alex could use his other arm, he would have definitely shown them a better performance."

Ramza chuckled, clearly aware that the three were annoyed that the academy professors didn't praise Alex and Lavinia, who had both contributed a lot in the battle earlier.

"Don't worry. The trial's not over yet," Ramza stated. "As long as they pass this trial, they will take the academy by storm."

Cairo, Elaine, and Efa all nodded because they believed that Ramza spoke the truth.

Alex's master had even decided to teach him a demon-slaying sword skill before continuing his journey. Cairo was just waiting for his sister and Alex to pass the second trial. For him, it was already a sure thing.

Two hours later, the trial taker who'd tried to steal the sigil and monster core gathered the other party leaders who had watched the battle against the Boss Monster.

"All of you have seen the battle, so you already know that their team is very strong," the teenage boy said. "So we have to eliminate them at all costs, or our chances of making the top 20 are in jeopardy."

"You just want to use us as borrowed knives to do the dirty work," a leader of the party replied in disdain. "If you really think they are a threat, then why don't you eliminate them on your own? Why are you dragging us into this mess?"

"That's right." Another team leader nodded. "We don't want to be dragged into this. There are eight of them, but since they already have a sigil, that means only seven of them will remain."

"There are still thirteen slots for the top 20 survivors, so if we play our cards right, we will be able to pass this trial. Why should we take a risk and eliminate them?"

"You say that now, but I'm sure you won't be singing the same tune once the last hours of the trial are upon us," the trial taker, who went by the name Theron, sneered. "Do you think that I'm only saying this because of what happened earlier?"

"Have you forgotten? Every hour, the mist spreads, shrinking the safe zones. There are still three more Boss Monsters remaining."

"They're all roaming the island, so it's only a matter of time before they head to the center, where all trial takers will congregate. I'm not saying we fight them head-on. I'm saying we lure the Boss Monsters toward them."

"Because if we don't, won't we be the next to get eliminated? Of course, we can all forget this discussion and stay in our own hiding places until the trial ends."

"We can do that, but do you really think the Headmaster hasn't considered that already? I believe something big will happen in the final hours. Something that'll wipe out most of our competition."

"There are exactly twenty of us here, so wouldn't it be nice if we all joined forces and passed this trial together?"

The three leaders glanced at each other, thinking this suggestion wasn't bad.

But none of them liked Theron's personality, so they backed out of the alliance he proposed.

"All of them are fools." Theron clicked his tongue in annoyance as he watched the other group leave. "I hope the Boss Monsters find them."

After venting his frustration, the young man led his team off to find a hiding spot that could keep them safe until the trial ended.

Once Theron's group left, the boulder he'd been sitting on suddenly moved.

It then revealed its true form, an Ape-Type Stone Monster, one of the four Boss Monsters on the island.

A wicked grin spread across its face. Unlike the other Boss Monsters that slaughtered trial takers on sight, this one preferred to toy with its prey.

After hearing such a juicy piece of news, the Stonehide Tyrant decided to observe for now.

However, on the last day of the trial, it would join its comrades to eliminate the trial takers and make them feel true despair.

Chapter 136: You're Not Playing Matchmaker, Are You?

Alex and his team returned to their temporary base to recover from the earlier battle.

The Oathkeeper's clothes were burned and singed in several places, so he had no choice but to change.

He had just taken off his shirt when Lavinia noticed the bruises, cuts, and burns still lingering on his skin despite the healing potions he had consumed.

“Alex, sit down for a bit,” Lavinia said as she took out a healing potion from her storage ring. “I’ll treat your injuries.”

“Thank you.” Alex didn’t resist and let Lavinia sprinkle and spread a bit of the healing potion on his body using her hand.

A sigh of relief left Alex’s lips as the potion’s cooling sensation eased his discomfort.

A few minutes later, Lavinia handed him another bottle of potion.

“I’ve already treated the injuries on your upper body. I believe you can apply these on your... lower half yourself,” Lavinia said before heading to the entrance of the cave they had chosen to be their temporary base.

“She’s mellowed out, hasn’t she, Dim Dim?” Alex asked.

“Dim.” Dim Dim nodded before chugging on a small bottle of healing potion as if it were some kind of fruit juice.

After removing his pants, Alex poured healing potion over the injuries on his legs. He also asked Dim Dim to help with the spots he couldn’t see or reach.

A few minutes later, Alex also went to the cave’s entrance, feeling better and dressed in a new set of clothes.

“That punch is really amazing,” Bob said to Renard. “Who taught you that move? Can I learn it too?”

“I’ve never seen anything like that,” Grint added. “Are you perhaps a disciple of a famous Martial Artist?”

Jorven, sensing that Renard wasn’t the kind who liked to talk with others, just watched as his two friends tried to make conversation with the boy who’d shown exceptional potential.

“...” Renard ignored the two boys talking to him and focused instead on the stew Nessia was cooking.

The sun was about to set, and he planned to rest after eating dinner.

Alex smirked at the sight of this scene. Renard was someone who would never talk to people unless absolutely necessary.

His serious trust issue made it hard for anyone to cozy up to him. In fact, it was nearly impossible.

“I have an announcement,” Alex said, catching everyone’s attention. “The Trial ends in a day and a half. So tomorrow, we’ll need to find a more secure location.”

“We all know the mechanics. The mist will soon force all the remaining trial takers to the center of the island. It’ll only be a matter of time before chaos explodes. I’m guessing, by the final hours of the trial, the remaining space will be reduced to more or less two kilometers.”

Alex had checked his map and found a special feature that let him see which areas would remain habitable during the final hours of the trial. That was how he had discovered that their current camp would be later overrun by the mist. It would be unsuitable as their last stand.

Lavinia and Charles nodded to acknowledge the young man’s explanation.

Nessia, who seemed to have also approved of Alex’s abilities, also nodded her head in understanding.

Bob, Grint, and Jorven felt indebted to Alex and had seen how much he cared for his team. They were thus more willing to agree to his proposal.

Only Renard eyed Alex critically, clearly debating whether to listen or not.

However, he had to agree that without a team to help him, it was impossible to survive the attack of a Rank 4 Boss Monster. They had to work together to defeat the previous one, but there were others left.

"I'll listen to you until this trial ends," Renard replied. "But after this, I will settle our score."

"You still haven't moved on?" Alex arched an eyebrow.

"No," Renard answered. "I'll make you pay for what you did to me."

"Hah..." Alex scratched his head. There was no helping it. Renard held grudges even in the game.

"I have a question." Bob raised his hand. "What are we going to do with the sigil?"

This was the question that had been in his mind since the beginning, and he wanted to know what Alex planned to do with it.

"The sigil will remain with Dim Dim," Alex replied without missing a beat, clearly expecting the question. "If any of us touches it, we will automatically be sent out of this Dungeon. Don't get me wrong, I'm not letting Dim Dim keep it because I want to use it myself."

"The only reason I had Dim Dim keep it is because I believe everyone here will be able to pass the trial as long as we all work together."

"Just like how we defeated the Rank 4 Boss Monster, everyone has a role to play. If one of us disappears, then wouldn't things become harder later on?"

Bob rubbed his chin. "So there's still a chance you'll use the sigil for yourself, right? After all, Dim Dim is your... pet?"

"Muuuh!" Dim Dim glared at the teenage boy who had just called it Alex's pet. Perhaps out of annoyance, it took out a brittle vial from its dimensional storage and prepared to throw it.

“Dim Dim is not a pet.” Alex hurriedly scooped up the little guy before it could throw the brittle vial in its hand. “It’s a Nature Spirit. Dim Dim is my partner. But you’re right. My words will not be enough to convince you that I won’t use the sigil for myself.

“And frankly, I don’t really care if you don’t believe me. If you wish to walk away, feel free to do so. I won’t force you to stay.”

“Hmph!” Dim Dim glared at the teenage boy and made a shooing motion, clearly telling Bob to leave the group pronto.

Bob shook his head and raised both of his hands. “I’m not leaving this team even if you kick me out by force. We’re going to survive this together! Also, sorry for calling you a pet earlier, Dim Dim. That was wrong of me.”

“Hmmp!” Dim Dim ignored Bob’s attempt to reconcile. However, it did return its brittle vial to its storage space, making Alex sigh in relief.

To prevent any more conflicts from escalating, Alex changed the topic. He came up with a schedule for them to follow at night when guarding the cave.

He asked Bob, Grint, and Jorven to act as the night watch for the first four hours.

After that, Charles and Nessia would take their place.

He and Lavinia would be the third batch of night watchers.

Last but not least would be Renard and Dim Dim.

The reason he paired up the two was for a simple reason.

Renard didn’t really trust people. However, Dim Dim could befriend anyone.

Alex wanted the two to get along, and maybe let the Dim Sum God smooth things up so Renard would no longer come after him after the trial ended.

Fortunately, no one tried to attack them all through the night.

When morning came, Alex asked Dim Dim to help them find a place that could be defended properly.

Naturally, Dim Dim was more than happy to help, so it led everyone to a hidden path that led to a temple at the center of the island.

The temple was concealed by an illusion, appearing as nothing more than a patch of forest trees.

Even Nessia, well-versed in magic formations, was impressed by the intricate symbols drawn to form it.

“Nessia, use this Rank 4 Monster Core to create a killing array,” Alex said. “Then use the cores that we have all gathered for a defensive formation. Do you think you will be able to finish both of them in half a day?”

“I don’t need half a day,” Nessia replied. “Four hours will do.”

“Good.” Alex nodded. “We will defend you in those four hours, so work without worries.”

“Understood.” Nessia then took Vulkarath’s Core and made preparations to transcribe the killing array that would fight off any threats that might come their way.

“Charles, guard Nessia closely,” Alex said with a mischievous smile. “Don’t let her get disturbed by anyone, okay?”

“You’re not playing matchmaker, are you?” Charles asked calmly.

“Matchmaker?” Alex blinked innocently. “What are you talking about? Wait, could it be that you—”

“Of course not!” Charles insisted before Alex could finish whatever he was going to say next. “We’re just friends.”

“Of course, I know that.” Alex smirked. “That’s why I’m asking you to guard her. I mean, are you not friends?”

Lavinia couldn’t help but smile because she was quite amused by the exchange between her two companions.

Fearing Alex might say something else, the teenage boy hurried to Nessia’s side. She was already using her staff to draw symbols on the ground, laying out the foundation of her killing array.

Chapter 137: The Seer Of The Stars

Throughout the time Alex’s team prepared for the last hours of the trial, the number of trial takers had drastically gone down to a mere three hundred.

There had been a thousand of them at the start, yet seventy percent of them had been wiped out—the culprits responsible were usually the Rank 4 Boss Monsters, who were now actively closing in on the last few survivors.

Theron, the one who initiated the formation of an alliance to eliminate Alex’s group, had no idea that a vicious monster had locked onto them. It was too late by the time they realized it, but fortunately, the monster didn’t eliminate them right away.

However, they were still unable to relax. They were constantly on the edge, rendering them incapable of falling asleep.

Dread shrouded them every time they closed their eyes. They couldn’t help but feel like the Stonehide Tyrant was merely waiting for them to break before it finally went for the kill.

The Ape-Like Monster was three-meters-tall and was made completely out of rocks.

It appeared and disappeared from time to time, emitting that ape-like laughter that gave them all goosebumps.

“I can’t take this anymore!” one of Theron’s teammates shouted before running in a different direction, separating himself from his group.

“Stop!” Theron shouted, but his teammate didn’t even bother to look back.

It didn’t take long for the teenage boy to disappear from their sight. Soon, it was followed by a bloodcurdling scream, reverberating throughout the forest.

Theron gnashed his teeth in anger.

“Run!” he ordered, taking the lead to run toward the center of the island.

They didn’t have to see it to know that their teammate had already been eliminated by the sadistic Boss Monster, who found great joy in toying with its prey.

More screams erupted in the surroundings, which meant other teams had unknowingly crossed paths with the monster that was pursuing them from behind.

High above the sky, a screech descended upon the trial takers as another Boss Monster made its presence known.

The Wind Razor Harpy Matron had dived down from the sky and made short work of the trial takers who were unlucky enough to cross her path.

A distance away, the thirty-meter-long Hellmaw Basilisk ended the misery of another team, even after they desperately tried to escape from its massive jaws.

Half of the three hundred people were now eliminated, and the Professors of the Academy knew it wouldn’t be long before the trial ended.

Some of them were monitoring the last few candidates, but the majority paid close attention to Alex and his teammates.

A middle-aged woman, also the magic professor for the first years, had taken a liking to Nessia after seeing her transcribe a killing array.

“She’s so young but already this capable,” the Magic Professor said to Rowan. “Headmaster, she’s a hidden gem among the trial takers.”

Rowan nodded because he agreed with her assessment.

“We’ll see how strong her magic formations are,” Rowan commented. “If she’s truly a good seedling, I’ll make an exception for you, Professor Isolde.”

“Thank you, Headmaster!” Professor Isolde smiled warmly.

She had a soft spot for talented magicians, and she could already tell that Nessia was one of the best seedlings among the trial takers.

After a few days of observation, only half a day remained before the trial ended.

So far, Alex’s group was the least affected by the roaming Boss Monsters. The illusion magic of the temple was quite strong, and these powerful monsters had always moved past them without noticing them.

Even so, the screams of the teenagers were impossible to ignore.

The only saving grace was that Alex’s group didn’t have to go out of the temple to get food and water. They were lucky to have Dim Dim, who made sure that everyone was well fed.

As for water, the temple had a spring of clear water, which they used to quench their thirst.

Bob, Grint, and Jorven were extremely happy with their decision to stay with Alex's group. Unlike the ones outside of the temple, they were currently safe without having to run for their lives.

Even Renard had to admit that—despite how he had been persuaded to join the team—things were going well. Instead of grumbling, he simply meditated and prepared for the upcoming battle.

Suddenly, several people passed through the illusion formation and arrived at the temple where Alex's group was staying.

There were more than twenty of them, and all of them looked very haggard.

"So you guys are here," a young lady wearing tribal attire said with a frown.

Above the palm of her hand, a blue crystal hovered—an artifact that could lead them to the safest place on the island at the moment.

Alex's team had already taken a defensive position, and Nessia was also ready to activate her killing array.

Although the newcomers had the advantage in numbers, they would all be eliminated the moment a fight between the two groups began.

"We're not here to fight," the young lady in tribal attire said. "We just want to survive until the trial ends."

"The Headmaster said that only twenty people will be allowed to become scholarship students," Renard replied. "We're over that limit right now, which only means one thing—you guys will later try to get rid of us."

"No, we won't." The young lady shook her head. "Although the Headmaster said the trial will end if only twenty survivors remain, that only holds true if the numbers of participants decrease drastically before the time limit."

“However, if we can endure until the trial ends, everyone who survives will pass the second trial.”

Renard frowned before glancing at his teammates, who only shook their heads as they hadn’t heard of such a loophole in the trial.

Alex, on the other hand, continued to stare at the young lady.

She was another familiar character from the game. She was the third daughter of the Chieftain of a tribe called the Silver Horn Tribe.

They were a mystic tribe of shamans and were quite powerful in their own right.

“Very well, you can stay,” Alex said after a minute of tense standoff between the two parties. “However, you guys can only stay where you are right now. The rest is off-limits.”

“What?!” Renard glared at the young man. “Are you crazy? You will allow them to stay? What will you do if they decide to backstab us?”

“If they try to backstab us, we will just eliminate them.” Alex shrugged before glancing at Nessia.

The young lady smiled faintly before giving Alex a thumbs-up.

Had the newcomers arrived before the killing array was finished, then Alex wouldn’t have allowed them to stay, even though he was familiar with the young lady wearing tribal clothing.

But now that it was done, he had nothing to fear.

With just a thought, Nessia could activate the killing array and wipe out their enemies before they could even understand what was happening.

Renard clicked his tongue in annoyance, but since Alex was the temporary leader of the group, he no longer argued and returned to the spot where he had been meditating a while ago.

“Remember this—if they do anything funny, I will go for the kill,” Renard said seriously.

“Please do.” Alex nodded before shifting his attention back to the young lady, who was the leader of the second group. “By the way, what’s your name?”

He already knew her name, but in order to build a bit of trust between them, he decided to ask for it.

The young lady with long, dark-red hair and green eyes made a gesture of friendship before stating her name.

“My name is Phoebe Amaris,” Phoebe introduced herself. “I am the third daughter of the Chieftain of the Silver Horn Tribe.”

Lavinia, who had been quietly listening to the conversation since earlier, gave Phoebe an appraising gaze.

The Clawford Tribe and the Silver Horn Tribe were two of the Major Tribes in the Kingdom of Avalon.

The Clawford Tribe resided in the south, while the Silver Horn Tribe resided in the north.

There were very few instances when the two tribes had to meet, so Lavinia didn’t know a lot about them aside from the stories her grandfather had told her.

“The Silver Horn Tribe?” Grint, who was the son of a merchant, looked at Phoebe in surprise. “You guys are half-demons, right? Where is your horn?”

“I am indeed a half-demon,” Phoebe replied, which made some of her teammates subconsciously take a step back away from her. “I apologize, but I can’t show you my horn right now.”

"I see." Grint nodded.

He then glanced at Renard and gave the latter a thumbs-up.

"The Silver Horn Tribe is a very friendly tribe, and my father does a lot of business with them," Grint stated.

"Also, I apologize to you, Miss Phoebe. I only asked about your horn earlier to confirm your identity. If you had really shown us your horn without hesitation, that would've meant you're not really a member of the Silver Horn Tribe."

"So it was a test." Phoebe nodded. "I forgive you, Mr....?"

"Grint," Grint replied. "Grint Varka."

"Oh... so you're Mr. Varka's son!" Phoebe smiled as if seeing a long-lost friend for the first time in years. "Your father has helped us many times in the past."

The exchange between Grint and Phoebe lowered the tension between the two groups.

Alex, who believed that a perfect opportunity had arrived, asked Dim Dim to give Phoebe and her teammates some food, while he brought them a few bottles of spring water.

He needed to make a good first impression because Phoebe was a true Seer.

She could see glimpses of the future, which had helped some of the Heroes and Heroines in the game, making her a very valuable support character.

'I didn't know that she was a scholarship student,' Alex thought. 'But meeting her now is a good thing.'

The young man planned to befriend Phoebe because knowing a Seer was equivalent to having a friend who could warn you if you were in danger.

Fortunately, she and the rest of her team were truly and utterly exhausted.

So Dim Dim's and Alex's timely offer of food and water left a good impression on the young lady, who would gain the title "Seer of the Stars" several years from now.

Chapter 138: Standing Beside The Heroes Of The World

Two years ago, my grandmother, a Seer, asked me to enroll in Frieden Academy.

My family could afford to pay for the tuition. All they had to do was trade some precious ores and gems, but they decided that I should take the scholarship test instead.

According to my grandmother, I need to meet a few people from the academy's second trial because they will one day stand by my side when the world needs them the most.

As a Seer, I know not all visions are set in stone. But unless someone does their best to defy their own destiny, nothing will change.

Even if you know that a disaster is coming, if you don't have the strength to stop it, the disaster will still happen.

"I can't believe you allowed those people here," the teenage boy with short black hair and hazel eyes complains as he glares daggers at the young man, whom they refer to as Alex.

Judging by his tone, it is very clear that he doesn't like our intrusion into their safe haven. Still, he is quite rude, so from now on, I will call him Mr. Brick. It's rather fitting—his head seems to be as hard as a brick.

"Calm down, Renard," Alex says. "There's no need to fight them. There are only a few hours until the trial ends, so why don't we just get along with each other?"

“Don’t go crying to me later if they stab your back.”

“Fine, fine. I won’t go crying to you, okay?”

Both of them are interesting people, but this cute, white creature in front of me is the most interesting of them all.

“Dim Dim~” Dim Dim takes out a bamboo steamer out of thin air and hands it to me.

“Thank you,” I say with a smile and pat the little one’s head, which makes the smile on its face widen.

After lifting the lid of the bamboo steamer, I see three white buns, which look very similar to Dim Dim.

Although it makes me feel a little sad that I’m about to bite something that looks like the cute little creature, I decided to give it a try.

‘Delicious!’ I am surprised that this snack, called a custard bun, tastes this good.

Given the danger that surrounds us, we haven’t had the luxury of time to cook properly. Before this, I had to rely on the rations my family had given me before I left my tribe.

This is the first time I feel so at ease since the second trial started.

‘Maybe they are the people that grandma was talking about,’ I wonder as I glance at Mr. Brick’s group.

Two girls, six boys, and one Dim Dim.

I was there when they fought against the Rank 4 Boss Monster, and seeing their fighting prowess made me understand that they were different from the rest of the trial takers.

I then recall my grandmother's words.

"In the second trial, you will find a sword that moves like a whip and a teenage boy who carries a curse that fills all the monsters in the world with bloodlust and draws them to him. Their stars have dimmed long ago and were supposed to fade from the starry sky.

"But lately, their stars shine brighter than ever, which means someone has changed the course of their destinies. Just like them, your star is supposed to lose its light a few years from now.

"However, I believe that if they have been able to change their fates, you will be able to do the same. Go to Frieden Academy, and meet the many heroes of the world.

"The lights of their stars are the same as yours, shining brightly. But it might soon be snuffed out by a force that wishes to break the balance of this world. So, stay by their side, for they will stand with you when the world needs them the most."

Although I am not certain, I believe that the sword that moves like a whip is referring to the Catkin, who is currently watching Mr. Brick and Alex bicker with each other.

As for the cursed person... can that possibly be Mr. Brick?

That cannot be, right?

Instead of being attacked by monsters, he looks like someone who will attack them first.

Just as I am pondering which of them might be the cursed person my grandmother was talking about, a loud banging sound shakes the place we are sheltering at.

"Something is trying to break through the barrier I set up," the young lady who is wearing glasses shouted. "Whatever it is, it's not alone!"

"I knew it!" Mr. Brick clicks his tongue. "Those people led those monsters to us. It's their fault!"

Grandma, please give me strength. I have never seen such a hateful person in my life! I wish he gets slapped by a monster, so he will finally stop blaming us for every bad thing that happens in his life!

The sound of something cracking reached my ears, prompting me to look up at the barrier behind my back.

Cracks are starting to form on its surface, making my teammates' faces turn pale.

I then glance at the young man with short silver hair, who seems to be the leader of the other group.

"Well, it's about time they find us," Alex says calmly. "Nessia, turn off the illusion so we can see what's attacking us."

Nessia nods and lightly taps the ground with her staff.

A moment later, I see a three-meter-tall Ape, whose entire body is made up of stone, punching the barrier.

Right after that, I notice that two other monsters are attacking the barrier at the same time.

A Harpy and a Basilisk. Their mere presence is enough to make me shudder.

Judging by the power that I am sensing from their bodies, they are probably the remaining Rank 4 Boss Monsters meant to hunt us down.

"Nessia, target the harpy on my signal," Alex orders.

"Okay!" Nessia replies.

Alex summons his shield and waits until the Harpy circles back for another attack.

“Now!” Alex shouts.

A second later, he throws his shield towards the Harpy, but the latter only deflects it without a problem.

However, a spear made of flames shoots out from the ground and pierces through the Harpy’s chest, making it cry out in shock and pain.

Blood spills from its chest, and the Boss Monster crashes on the temple grounds. My teammates back away in haste.

However, as we retreat to safety, Alex, the Catkin, and a teen boy charge at the Harpy at the same time.

Clearly, they intend to fight it.

I watch with dread as the Ape, which is made up of stone, and the Basilisk intensify their attacks on the barrier.

It is very obvious that they want to break it in order to save their comrade.

Glancing at my teammates, it is very clear that none of them have the intention of fighting alongside Alex and his party.

Gritting my teeth, I know that the time to fight has come.

This is why I fling caution to the wind and run toward the Harpy that has fallen on the ground.

I let my mana circulate inside my body, calling out my bloodline power.

I am a member of the Silver Horn Tribe and, although we prefer to live in peace, there are bound to be times when we need to fight to protect our honor and dignity.

For a brief moment, I see Alex glancing in my direction, and he gives me a thumbs-up.

I know that he has been observing me since earlier, and it was making me feel a little uncomfortable.

For some reason, I feel that he knows something about me, something that even I don't know about myself.

But this is not the time for such things.

The time to fight has come, and I want to see if the people with me right now are truly the heroes that my grandmother has instructed me to meet.

Chapter 139: Teen Titan

Alex watched Phoebe run toward them. On her forehead, a silver horn slowly materialized with a faint light, pulsing with magic.

A staff then emerged within her grip, which she pointed at the Windrazor Harpy Matron, whom Nessia's killing array had critically injured.

Vines rose from the ground and entangled themselves around the Boss Monster, preventing it from flying back to the sky.

So far, everything had gone according to Alex's plan.

He had deliberately thrown his shield earlier to block the monster's view of the Flame Spear created by Nessia's killing array, catching the Harpy by surprise.

By the time the Harpy had deflected the thrown shield, the flame spear had already taken flight.

Alex and Nessia had had a lengthy discussion about their opener act and settled with this strategy, believing the element of surprise would help them deal with the Boss Monster better.

For the killing array, the Rank 4 Core of the Two-Horned Blaze Wolf served as the main ingredient, significantly boosting its offensive properties.

As expected, the flaming spear cut down the Boss Monster's health by more than half, proving its power.

Professor Isolde smiled in satisfaction as she watched the young lady, whom she had already set her sights on, accomplish this amazing feat.

The other Professors were also impressed by the power of the killing array, improving their already-good impression of Nessia.

"Tear off its wings!" Alex roared as he activated his Shield Charge to close the gap between him and the Boss Monster.

The young man's shield slammed on the Harpy's head, stunning it briefly.

Bob, Grint, and Jorven all aimed at the monster's right wing, hacking it as if their lives depended on it.

Renard, being Renard, ignored Alex's order and smashed his fists into the Harpy Queen's head, intending to deal as much damage as possible in the limited time he had.

Lavinia targeted the left wing of the Harpy, unleashing quick and devastating strikes that were meant to cut it down.

Charles also hacked the same area Lavinia had targeted, successfully tearing off one of the Harpy's wings.

An ear-piercing screech escaped the Harpy's lips as one of its wings was cut off from its body.

But before it could take revenge on the teenagers who had decided to put their lives on the line to fight it, a giant flame spear appeared above its body as Nessia unleashed the true power of the killing array.

“Everyone, back away!” Alex ordered before running away.

This time, Renard heeded his command and distanced himself from the Boss Monster that was about to be skewered by Nessia’s ultimate attack.

“Hellfire Spear!” Nessia shouted as she swung her staff, commanding the giant spear to descend at the Harpy, who was helplessly held in place by the vines entangling its body.

A bloodcurdling scream threatened to burst everyone’s eardrums as the spear pierced through the Harpy’s body, killing it in one strike.

Alex knew how powerful Nessia’s killing array was, especially since it was empowered by a Rank 4 Core harvested from a powerful Boss Monster, but he was still a little taken aback when he witnessed it in action.

As the Harpy turned into particles of light, Dim Dim once again appeared to snatch away the sigil and the monster core.

Before the candidates could even celebrate, the sound of countless glasses breaking at the same time reached their ears.

The Stonehide Tyrant and the Hellmaw Basilisk had finally broken the barrier.

However, the two Boss Monsters had been too late—one of their comrades was already dead.

“Run!” one of Phoebe’s teammates yelled.

Her teammates all ran in different directions, hoping Alex's team could buy them some time to distance themselves from the Boss Monsters.

"Charles, protect Nessia!" Alex ordered. "She needs some time to use the power of the killing array again. Lavinia, Phoebe, Bob, Grint, Jorven—work together to fend off the Basilisk!

"Dim Dim, Renard—we're dealing with that stone ape! Nessia, once you're ready, kill the Basilisk first!"

After giving his orders, Alex didn't hesitate to charge at the Stonehide Tyrant to keep it at bay.

Dim Dim was hot on his heels, looking at the Boss Monster with a face filled with determination.

Renard understood that Alex made the right call, as only he would be able to deal a serious injury to the Stonehide Tyrant.

With that in mind, the teenager decided to cooperate with him for the time being.

The Stonehide Tyrant was intelligent, so it understood what Alex thought. Putting that into consideration, it decided to attack the other team, which had now clashed with the Hellmaw Basilisk.

"Come here, Donkey Kong!" Alex shouted.

< Taunt [EX] activated! >

The monster, long used to getting its way, let out a roar as it shifted its attention to Alex, intending to swat him into oblivion.

When the two were only a few meters away from each other, the Stonehide Tyrant unleashed a punch that should crush the puny human's shield.

However, Alex did something that no one expected.

He dodged!

Even Ramza and Cairo blinked as they watched this happen, knowing Alex's tendency to face the attacks of the monster head-on.

"My Agility stat is not just for show!" Alex roared. "Eat this!"

"Shield Bash!"

The young man unleashed an uppercut using his shield to hit the monster's jaw, creating a loud clanging sound as metal hit stone.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim shouted as it crawled up Alex's body before jumping off from his head and throwing a brittle vial filled with a green liquid.

Renard heard the sizzling sound of acid as Dim Dim's attack landed on the monster's face.

White smoke rose up to block the monster's vision, preventing it from seeing the teenage boy's deadly attack.

"Titan Breaker!" Renard roared as he unleashed the punch that had crippled the Two-Horned Blaze Wolf.

His fist landed squarely on the monster's "ahem," breaking whatever was located there.

Since the monster was three meters tall, Renard had been torn on where to punch it.

He could have punched its legs to reduce its mobility, but thinking of the frustrations he wished to vent out, he decided to attack the monster's "weak spot" with all the strength he could possibly muster.

A bloodcurdling scream reverberated in the surroundings after the deed was done.

Given its stone body, dealing a serious injury to the Rank 4 Boss Monster was difficult.

But Renard was a bad matchup for it.

When breaking stones, blunt weapons were usually more effective than swords.

And Renard's fist was the strongest blunt weapon their party possessed right now.

The Rank 4 Boss Monster rolled on the ground in pain after receiving such a devastating blow.

At least that was what Alex and Renard thought at that time.

However, the Boss Monster turned into a rolling boulder and launched itself in Renard's direction like a cannonball.

It was fast. Renard couldn't possibly dodge in time.

At that critical moment, Alex activated his skill, Oathkeeper's Duty, instantly teleporting in front of Renard to tank the blow.

While Alex's timing was perfect, the monster's attack was no joke, and both teenagers were both sent flying by the transmitted force.

The giant boulder then started to roll in their direction, intending to finish off what it had started.

All the spectators of the academy watched with bated breath as this battle, which would determine the fate of the trial takers, suddenly tilted in the Boss Monsters' favor.

Chapter 140: This Guy Is Crazy!

“Ngh!” Renard groaned as Alex’s body landed hard on top of him, the weight pressing them together, after the Stonehide Tyrant’s rolling attack sent them flying.

This time, Renard had no complaints. If it weren’t for Alex blocking the attack meant for him, his injuries would’ve been far worse than the cuts and bruises he got from slamming against Alex and the ground.

The Oathkeeper rolled his aching body to the side, using his shield to prop himself up from the ground.

After coming to the world of Arcana, he had tanked countless blows. And when he was strong enough, it had been easy for him to handle most of them.

That said, there were exceptions. He had to admit getting rammed by the Stone Ape reminded him of his past fight against the Mini Boss, Crimson Fire Salamander.

Alex had been so weak then that every Fire Bullet he blocked from the attacking monster felt like getting hit by a truck.

He had tanked a hundred of those shots before he reached the condition to qualify as an Oathkeeper.

With that as a base of comparison, Alex understood that he could only block five to six more attacks from the Stonehide Tyrant before his strength would fail him.

Knowing that it was impossible for him and Renard to hold off their opponent for a long time, Alex made a decision.

“Dim Dim!” Alex shouted. “Give the Harpy Core to Nessia! She will know what to do!”

“Dim!” Dim Dim, who was heading to their location, stopped and ran in the opposite direction.

The Stonehide Tyrant was the smartest among the Boss Monsters, and the young man’s shout made him target the Dim Sum God.

It once again rolled on the ground and sped up to catch up to the Dim Dim.

But at that moment, something slammed into its side, pushing it away from the fleeing Dim Sum God.

Alex had used his Shield Charge in an attempt to prevent the Boss Monster from ruining their last chance of winning this battle.

The impact of the shield charge made the Stonehide Tyrant return to its original form, but the monster wasn't fazed.

After recovering its balance, it unleashed a backhand blow at Alex, creating a resounding clang as the latter blocked the blow with his shield.

But because the young man wasn't able to get a proper footing when he blocked the attack, he was once again sent flying and crashed several meters away with a loud thud.

"Argh..." Alex groaned in pain, unable to get up for the time being.

Even so, he threw his shield toward the Boss Monster in order to buy time for Dim Dim to reach Nessia.

"Shield Boomerang!"

The shield spun and flew in a curving arc. However, the Boss Monster simply swatted it away before continuing its pursuit.

It thought that the young man no longer had any tricks that could stop it, but it was wrong.

The monster had just taken five steps when something smacked the back of its head, making it cry out in pain.

It glanced angrily behind him and saw Alex holding a wooden sandal firmly in his hand.

“You mad, bro?” Alex sneered as he used the wooden sandal to make a come over here gesture. “Come here so I can smack you silly!”

Renard, standing a few meters away from Alex, couldn’t help but wonder if the young man was suicidal.

He believed that Alex could have just continued lying on the ground and let the others deal with the Stonehide Tyrant. And yet, the other party didn’t do that, which made him wonder why the former was desperately trying to get the Boss Monster’s attention.

‘This guy is crazy!’ Renard thought. ‘He wants to die so badly!’

A hate-filled roar broke him out of his daze, making him turn in the direction of the Stonehide Tyrant.

It was currently running in their direction with bloodshot eyes, ready to annihilate the annoying young man who kept on getting in its way.

Alex didn’t back down and charged to face his opponent.

When the two of them were within striking distance of each other, the Stonehide Tyrant raised its fist to smash the young man to meat paste.

But the blow never landed. Alex had already leapt to the side, narrowly dodging the attack.

Stone and dirt flew in every direction as the impact of the Boss Monster’s attack missed its target.

‘I thought he was suicidal, but looks like he has a plan!’ Renard watched as the young man continued to dodge the monster’s attack, using his superior speed to evade.

The Stonehide Tyrant was similar to Renard. Their stats were focused on strength and constitution, so Alex was barely able to dodge the monster’s incoming strikes.

After arriving in Arcana, Alex understood that dumping all his stat points into his Constitution for toughness wasn't the smartest move. All it would do was let him suffer a slow, painful death.

As a frontliner, his job was to draw the monster's attention, but relying solely on defense was suicide, especially since he expected to fight alongside Dim Dim in every battle.

That was why he prioritized Agility. It made him faster, harder to hit, and also gave him the option to dodge incoming blows.

Besides, for a Shield Savant like him, Agility came with an added bonus. It enhanced a class-specific rare skill that could instantly take down a Boss Monster if the conditions were met.

He might be an Oathkeeper, but he believed in ELO's endless possibilities. There must be a way to merge the two hidden professions, creating a brand new legendary job class.

Renard gritted his teeth as he made a decision to finally join the fray. He could only use Titan Breaker once a day since it put a lot of strain on his body.

If he were to use it one more time, there was a chance that his hand would be broken due to the recoil of the attack.

The spot that he had punched on the Boss Monster earlier had regenerated, but he was confident that if he hit the same place one more time, the monster would definitely feel a world of pain, bringing it close to death.

But there was one problem.

Renard wasn't sure if it was worth it to have a broken hand before the trial could even end.

For now, he simply threw caution to the wind and charged at his foe, who was having a hard time hitting Alex with its relentless attacks.

The Oathkeeper would dodge and counterattack by targeting the monster's head with brittle vials, specifically ones with the new blend Dim Dim had mixed, containing alchemical acid they had bought after coming to the City of Harmonia.

It was a very corrosive acid, capable of melting many things.

Unfortunately, rocks weren't among the things that the acid could melt.

Still, it dealt enough damage to the Stonehide Tyrant, making it angrier with each brittle vial smashed on its face!

"Eat this!" Renard roared as he punched the leg of the Boss Monster, sending rocks flying the moment his fist made contact with its leg.

The teenage boy didn't stop with a single punch and unleashed a few more punches with great power and accuracy, targeting a single spot.

"Watch out!" Alex shouted.

Upon hearing Alex's warning, Renard didn't hesitate to back away, barely evading the Boss Monster's counterattack.

Just as Alex was about to taunt the Boss to catch its attention, he saw something small and white running in his direction.

"Dim Dim!" Dim Dim shouted, announcing that it had completed its mission.

A moment later, the sound of the Hellmaw Basilisk's screech reached his ear, prompting him to glance in the direction where his other team members were fighting it.

Half of the giant snake's body had been cut cleanly in half by Nessia's giant Wind Blade, which was powered by the Harpy's core.

"Die!" Nessia shouted as she unleashed a Flame Spear that pierced through the Boss Monster's head, making the Hellmaw Basilisk's body collapse on the ground and turn into particles of light.

Lavinia, closest to the boss, used her whip to snatch the sigil before throwing it in Dim Dim's direction.

"Take it, Dim Dim!" Lavinia shouted.

"Dim!" Dim Dim jumped high in the air and caught the sigil like a professional baseball player before storing it inside its dimensional storage.

Charles then grabbed the Basilisk's monster core and threw it in Nessia's direction.

The Stonehide Tyrant, who saw its comrade's demise, immediately stopped attacking Alex and Renard.

It curled into a boulder and rolled away from the temple, intending to escape.

Since everyone was already too tired to fight and didn't dare to go outside Nessia's magic formation, they could only watch as the last Boss Monster disappeared from their sight.